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Over the last seven years of combat operations in the War on Terrorism, more than a million brave servicemen and women have faithfully served in Afghanistan and Iraq. Nearly 5,000 have died; thousands of others bear the scars of war. All of them, regardless of their individual experience or contribution, were exposed to some level of risk.

For those soldiers and Marines on the front lines, many of whom carried the brunt of the security responsibility in Iraq or continue to lead the fight in Afghanistan, dangerous confrontations with the enemy are a daily occurrence. While many have been recognized for their heroism, others have not. Thousands of combat citations have been presented to these heroes but, among these well-deserving individuals, only five have received the Medal of Honor - each one awarded posthumously.

The Medal of Honor is our nation's highest military award for combat heroism. It has been awarded to both surviving and deceased servicemembers since 1863. In World Wars I and II, as well as Vietnam, more than half of the Medals of Honor awarded went to living recipients. After three years of fighting in the Korean War, 133 medals were awarded to surviving service personnel.

The five recipients of the Medal of Honor in Iraq and Afghanistan are all worthy, without question. However, the fact that there has not been one living recipient from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan demonstrates that a new standard - whereby action worthy of the Medal of Honor must result in death - has been created.

Earlier this year, I wrote to President Barack Obama about the lack of living Medal of Honor recipients. My letter not only reflected the viewpoint of a newly elected member of Congress but also a Marine combat veteran of both wars. Specifically, I questioned the apparent inconsistent criteria for determining award recipients.

The response to that letter, written by Acting Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Gail McGinn, suggested that electronic warfare might be the reason why so few

Medals of Honor have been awarded for service in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, including none to a living recipient. "Technological advancements have dramatically changed battlefield tactics, techniques and procedures. Precision-guided, stand-off weapons allow our forces to destroy known enemy positions with reduced personnel risk," according to McGinn. These factors, she goes on to say, "could reasonably explain the smaller number of Medal of Honor nominations by the Military Departments."

I couldn't disagree more with this reasoning. It's true that some aspects of warfare have changed in recent years but troops continue to move from house to house, street to street, village to village in order to take ground from the enemy. These actions - like they were in World Wars I and II, Korea or Vietnam - are no different today.

Most certainly, there have been actions performed by surviving service personnel that are consistent with the tradition of the Medal of Honor. Individuals such as Marine Corps Capt. Brian Chontosh and Sgt. Maj. Bradley Kasal - both of whom were awarded the Navy Cross - are worthy candidates. Others demonstrated similar acts of heroism and, like Chontosh and Kasal, deserve to be considered for our nation's highest military honor.

There have also been several cases where posthumous recommendations have been downgraded at the final stages of the review process. The most notable involves Marine Corps Sgt. Rafael Peralta, who was killed in Iraq when he absorbed a grenade blast with his body, saving the lives of his fellow Marines. Peralta received the Navy Cross despite being recommended for the Medal of Honor by his chain of command.

That decision was reached by an independent review panel composed of two pathologists, a neurosurgeon and several other so-called "experts." The panel determined that Sgt. Peralta could not have consciously performed the actions witnessed by those Marines at his side and acknowledged by Marine Corps leadership.

Altogether, these inconsistencies prompted me to offer an amendment to the 2010 Defense Authorization Act that directs the secretary of Defense to review the Medal of Honor award process and report to Congress by early next year. This amendment, which was accepted during consideration of the legislation by the House Armed Services Committee, is an important first step in the effort to ensure American servicemembers who perform extraordinary and often unexplainable acts of bravery are rightly recognized for their actions.

The stories of Medal of Honor recipients continue to inspire millions of Americans. They define the meaning of selflessness. They serve to strengthen the history and tradition of our military, calling others to service and reminding us all that freedom comes at an extraordinary cost. For these reasons alone, it is important that the combat heroism represented by the Medal of Honor is preserved for future generations.

Rep. Duncan Hunter, a California Republican, serves on the House Armed Services Committee.